

# Chapter Two: College Degree

## UNH graduate achieves dream

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CHERYL KARAHALIOS '18

Cheryl Karahalios '18 had a full career with a 4-hour daily commute before she decided to go back to college. She worked at Massachusetts General Hospital, in the patient cardiac transplant unit. It wasn't dull.

But after a while, sitting in a windowless office, staring at a computer screen most of the day, Karahalios started thinking about a different life. So, in September 2015, she decided to pursue her long-held dream of a college degree and took her first class at UNH. On May 19, she'll graduate with a bachelor's

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degree in [recreation management and policy](#) (RMP). It is, she says, the fulfillment of a lifelong goal.

And it is only the beginning. Karahalios, a nontraditional student, has plans, even if they are still evolving. Right now, she's thinking she will continue on for her master's degree and work part-time. Her enthusiasm for doing so comes with high praise for UNH.

"UNH is one of New Hampshire's hidden gems. It's amazing what's going on," the Dover, New Hampshire, resident says. "I don't think people realize how deep the course offerings are. People who live in the state need to know they have this great resource — they don't have to go to the city to get an education. There is such great energy here.

"At first I was hesitant about coming here because I knew UNH was a very young campus," Karahalios says. "But the students have been so welcoming, so generous with their knowledge. And my professors really helped keep me on track — the RMP department is like a huge family."

If all goes according to plan, that track will eventually lead to working with conservation or environmental education programs, perhaps for a municipality or school department. An internship she completed with the [USDA Forest Service](#) in Durham gave her a glimpse into the variety of ways she could put her degree to work in those areas; during her internship, Karahalios developed an outdoor educational game for the Urban Forestry Center in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, that helps teach participants what's around them.

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Unlike some students, Karahalios “came in knowing” what she wanted to study. Before she started, she spent time looking at all of the possibilities for a major. “As soon as I got to the recreation management department and read what I could do with that degree, I knew it was for me. It has so many applications,” Karahalios says.

As someone who has always camped and hiked and walked the beaches with her family, teaching them about life in the forests and tidal pools, Karahalios now envisions a job whose applications will, in part, involve being outside.

“I want to be able to offer those experiences to others, to help guide people through this great world we have here and teach them to be good stewards,” she says.

Her family has been supportive of her college career right from the start. Friends were also very supportive if not somewhat amazed that she “had taken on such a big project.” As commencement neared and people began asking what she planned to do next, she found herself saying she didn’t know.

“I had made myself be very present during this experience, so I really didn’t know,” Karahalios says. “Having these young people around who think that everything is possible makes you think it is. It makes you think differently. This is a second chapter.”

**Interested in studying recreation management and policy? Visit UNH this summer and learn more.**

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